

# **Strengthening the Arannayk Foundation (Bangladesh Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation) Phase I**

Public Awareness Strategy  
For Conservation of Tropical Forest Biodiversity

## **Task Order under the Biodiversity & Sustainable Forestry IQC (BIOFOR)**

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## Executive Summary

The Arannayk Foundation has been established for the purpose of facilitating tropical forest conservation in Bangladesh, involving the full spectrum of stakeholders, and focusing on the development of public-private partnerships for developing and implementing conservation activities. The Foundation's strategic plan includes development of mass public awareness regarding forest biodiversity conservation issues and the importance of Bangladesh's tropical forest assets. In order for the Foundation's programs to be successful, awareness and support will need to be generated within all forest communities and across all existing and potential users of forest resources, which broadly defined includes all of the general public of Bangladesh.

A relatively broad knowledge base and skills sets have already been developed, particularly within the NGO community, and this experience can be drawn on for the purpose of further promoting forest biodiversity conservation in Bangladesh. Also, the main conservation issues have already been documented. Hence there is both good information and an experiential base, and some existing awareness, on which to build additional public awareness activities.

A wide variety of methods and techniques are available for developing public awareness, and can be put to use in promoting forest biodiversity conservation. These include modern mass media (newspapers, magazines, radio, television, film); traditional media (songs and plays); printed materials (posters, leaflets and illustrated booklets); billboards and wall-writing; messages printed on bags, transport, signs and other things used or encountered in daily life; use of popular personalities as advocates; school programs; outdoor education programs; and interpretive facilities in protected areas.

Key practical considerations in the development of public awareness are: 1) that the public has an important stake in forest conservation, and that public-private partnerships are required for the conservation of forest resources; and 2) that effective development of public awareness will require a dual national and local focus. The key issue in the development of public awareness is the conservation of tropical forest biodiversity in Bangladesh, in the face of a limited and diminishing resource, heavy and increasing utilization, and the failure of current government programs to effectively conserve forest resources. The key messages, that tropical forest biodiversity is a resource that belongs to all Bangladeshis, and that tropical forest biodiversity is a resource that can be utilized sustainably, will need to be developed and delivered by selected partner organizations, with overall guidance by the Foundation.

Key recommended actions focus on:

1. Immediate development of awareness of the Foundation's program within potential partners and target groups, with a subsequent focus on broader conservation issues of interest and relevance to the general Bangladeshi public, on mobilization of broad public support for

locally implemented activities in forest conservation, and on integration of successful public-private partnership activities into public awareness programming.

2. Identification of appropriate partners for further development and implementation of the Foundation's public awareness strategy, including preparation of a long-term work plan and budget.
3. Establishment of a website providing information on the Foundation's programs, and the opportunity for partner and public input.
4. Development of a network of organizations engaged in biodiversity conservation and related activities in Bangladesh, with the objective of developing and sharing information on tropical forest biodiversity, and education and communication materials for development of public awareness.
5. Development of public awareness activities based on as wide a range of methods and techniques as possible, including a broadly-based school program and other activities focusing on children.

## **SECTIONS**

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### **1. Background**

The Arannayk Foundation (Bangladesh Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation) has been established for the express purpose of facilitating tropical forest conservation in Bangladesh. Initially funded by US debt relief, it aims to attract additional donor and private sector funding in support of a long-term, sustainable program of forest conservation interventions. It also aims to involve all stakeholders (government, NGOs, forest communities and the private sector) in the development and implementation of its program.

The Foundation's mandate requires it to be innovative in its approach, focusing on public-private partnerships for forest conservation. For the Foundation's initiatives to succeed, it is essential that there is both broad public understanding of the objectives of forest conservation, and direct support for the pursuit of these objectives at the local forest community level. In order to facilitate this understanding and support, the Foundation's strategic plan includes development of mass public awareness regarding forest biodiversity conservation issues. This report defines the objective and scope of the Foundation's public awareness strategy, identifies the target audience, identifies and discusses the range of methods and techniques that could be used to raise awareness, discusses a number of practical considerations in the development and implementation of public awareness activities by the Foundation, develops a strategic framework, and provides recommendations for action.

### **2. Objective and Scope of the Public Awareness Strategy**

#### **2.1 Objective**

The main objective of the public awareness strategy is to ensure widespread awareness, among all stakeholders, of the importance of Bangladesh's tropical forest assets. This enhanced and widespread awareness is expected to generate both public support and additional funding for forest conservation and biodiversity protection.

#### **2.2 Scope and Target Groups**

To develop and implement its program of activities, the Foundation will need to form working partnerships with NGOs, government organizations, development assistance agencies and the private sector. The Foundation will also need to gain the support and cooperation of policy makers, government officials, and decision-makers at all levels. Awareness of conservation issues within this group of organizations and people is critically important to the successful implementation of the Foundation's programs, and will be promoted by the Foundation as an integral part of its activities development. Raising awareness among policy-makers and decision-makers, although a relatively small group, will be particularly important for the initial development and implementation of the Foundation's programming. Various means, including personal contacts, meetings, workshops and written materials, will be employed by the Foundation in order to secure the cooperation of these partners.

However, for the Foundation's programs to be successful –that is, to have a real, positive and lasting impact on the conservation of Bangladesh's tropical forests and their constituent biodiversity– awareness and support will need to be generated across a much broader base, including all forest communities, and all existing and potential users of forest resources. The latter group can be taken as including virtually all residents of Bangladesh, if the entire spectrum of use of forest resources (from fuelwood and fodder to ecotourism experiences) is considered. Hence this mass general public is ultimately the target group for public awareness development activities, and for this public awareness strategy.

### **3. Methods for Public Awareness Development**

#### **3.1 Existing Resources**

The development of public awareness regarding the importance of tropical forests and conservation of biodiversity is not a new issue in Bangladesh. A relatively broad knowledge base and skills sets have already been developed over many years of public awareness activities, particularly within the NGO community. This experience can be drawn on for the purpose of further promoting forest biodiversity conservation in Bangladesh.

A number of Bangladeshi NGOs are currently active in the broad field of awareness development, although not necessarily focusing on environmental/biodiversity issues. Of the 591 member NGOs listed by ADAB (2000), 201 (34.0%) list “advocacy” as a program/working area, 88 (14.9%) are active in “development communication,” and 70 (11.8%) are active in “media linkage/campaign”. An overview of NGOs and other potential partner organizations already having technical competencies in biodiversity conservation and related activities, including development and dissemination of awareness materials, is provided in our accompanying report on “Curriculum for NGO Training in Conservation of Tropical Forest Biodiversity”.

Also, although much remains to be done regarding inventory and documentation of the current state of forest biodiversity in Bangladesh, the main conservation issues have already been documented (e.g., in the Forestry Master Plan, National Conservation Strategy, National Environmental Action Plan, Annual State of Environment Reports, IUCN Red Data Books, and other publications dealing specifically with environment and forest conservation issues). Awareness materials related to these and other initiatives have already been prepared and widely disseminated, including a variety of posters and illustrated booklets delivering conservation messages in both Bangla and English. Articles dealing with environmental issues and increasingly with biodiversity frequently appear in the popular press (daily newspapers and magazines). Although limited in reach to the literate segment of society, this delivery mechanism has already initiated the development of awareness of biodiversity conservation issues and is a key means for continuing the development of a broader awareness base. Hence there is both good information and experiential base, and some existing awareness, on which to build additional public awareness activities.

Additional information on global and regional conservation concerns also is widely available. For example, FAO's Forests, Trees and People Program has initiated a subprogram (Future Forests) for producing environmental education materials related to sustainable use and

conservation of forests on a global basis. To date, a cartoon magazine, teacher's guide, English language supplement and poster have been produced. These materials are highly suitable for use in school programs for awareness building, particularly in association with (but not limited to) teaching of English. Similarly, the Centre for Environmental Education (based in India) produces a variety of materials (books, manuals, games, videos) aimed at children, children's educators and school libraries. Some of these materials are available in Bangla and hence provide a ready-made resource for use in school programs for awareness building. The CEE also provides training opportunities for environmental educators.

### **3.2 Methods and Techniques for Developing Public Awareness**

A wide variety of methods and techniques are available for developing public awareness, and can be put to use in promoting forest biodiversity conservation in Bangladesh. Public awareness activities that could be carried out in support of the "forest conservation message" are listed below under the main types of delivery mechanisms. This list is not exhaustive and may be expanded as the Foundation's public awareness strategy is implemented and further developed.

#### **3.2.1 Modern Mass Media**

The mass media (newspapers, magazines, radio, television, film) provide one of the most effective, ready-made means of reaching a wide target audience. Potential activities include:

Organization of workshops, field visits and sensitization courses for print and broadcast journalists, with the aim of developing an adequate knowledge base for conveying reliable information to the public. Outstanding journalists could be provided additional sensitization through sponsored travel to international meetings and training courses.

Development of a syndicated feature and photo service on forest and biodiversity conservation for newspapers and magazines.

Publication of messages and slogans as paid advertisements in newspapers and magazines. These will be most effective if accompanied by attractive or dramatic photographs or other illustrations.

Publication of special and investigative reporting on forest conservation issues. This could be encouraged by recognizing journalistic efforts through annual awards for the best reports, features and photographs.

Development of radio discussions, and radio spots conveying specific conservation messages, for broadcast both in Bangla and local languages.

Production of television spots, dramas and other programming, with content aimed at an appropriate audience, recognizing that television watchers in Bangladesh are primarily urban residents. There are already some good examples in Bangladesh of use of message-oriented television programming (e.g., in conveying public health messages).

Production of special documentary films for screening on television, in schools, community centers, rural bazaars and other public gatherings. Such films could convey either a national level theme (e.g., forest conservation in Bangladesh) or locally-based message (e.g., conservation issues in the Chittagong Hill Tracts).

Production of slides and short features for screening in cinema halls prior to main features. Film shows are an extremely popular medium in Bangladesh and provide a captive and diverse audience for conservation-related messages.

### 3.2.2 Traditional Media

In addition to the modern print and broadcast media, there are several traditional media in Bangladesh that are very effective communication tools, especially in rural areas. These include the following:

- *Pot gaan* is a musical performance utilizing sheet paintings that are unfurled as the performance proceeds. It tells the story of a problem or an issue with people gathered around the performers, and can be presented either in the open street or indoors. It is currently being used in the Khulna area to promote conservation awareness in the Sundarbans.
- *Street drama* is another form of performance that conveys specific messages. It is presented in open streets, with people gathered around to watch the performance.
- *Kabi gaan* is an argument in entertaining, poetic form between two rural poets. The poets trade improvised lyrical arguments, with the audience encircling the performers.
- *Jari gaan* is a type of folk singing that is especially popular in rural areas. Specific messages could be delivered using this medium either in front of live audiences or through radio broadcasts.

Traditional performers are often skilled at translating complex messages into forms that can be easily understood by rural populations or populations with low literacy levels. They have the added advantage of blending the message with popular entertainment media. While traditional media are limited in their ability to reach a large audience, traditional performances can be recorded and disseminated using modern media, particularly radio, to reach a large audience. The approach can be taken a step further by testing audience reactions to the production, recording discussions of the message by audience members, and presentation of this audience interaction in addition to the basic message. This melding of the effectiveness of traditional media with the efficiency of modern media in reaching a large audience, has often proven to be one of the most effective ways to communicate messages to rural populations or populations with low literacy levels.



### **3.2.3 Printed Materials**

Printed materials such as posters, leaflets and illustrated booklets have already been widely utilized in Bangladesh for conveying conservation information and messages. However, there is broad scope for production of additional materials, particularly with illustrated messages aimed at rural audiences. Posters are especially effective as they can be widely distributed and displayed in public areas. Leaflets are particularly cost-effective and can be mass-distributed in rural bazaars.

All printed materials will be most effective when they are attractively illustrated, and with a clear and to the point message.

### **3.2.4 Billboards and Wall-writing**

Billboards provide an easy and cost-effective method of attracting the attention of a broad cross-section of people. Specific messages can be conveyed through the use of slogans and attractive pictures. Similarly, boundary walls are widely used throughout Bangladesh for displaying commercial advertising, and this technique could also be used for disseminating messages on forest conservation.

### **3.2.5 Messages in Daily Life**

Messages printed on jute bags, t-shirts, rickshaws, buses, shop signboards, window displays and other things used or encountered in daily life can be an effective means of passively conveying a message to a wide audience. A primary feature of this technique is that the messages are frequently encountered and reinforced, and impossible to ignore. This technique could potentially be used to convey conservation-oriented messages, but the amount of information that can be included is very limited, and messages need to be both memorable and to the point.

### **3.2.6 Popular Personalities**

Personalities known from TV, music, film, traditional forms of entertainment and sports can be effective spokespersons and advocates of popular causes, as they have massive public appeal. Inviting such personalities to become involved in public awareness campaigns could be an effective means of promoting forest conservation. A primary advantage of this technique is that it can reach a wide and varied audience.

### **3.2.7 School Programs**

School programs have been shown elsewhere to be one of the most effective means of promoting awareness of “green” environmental issues. Advantages are a large and receptive target audience, and an established structure (the school system) that facilitates dissemination and presentation of materials. Potential techniques include incorporation of conservation-related materials in textbooks and curricula, presentation of audio-visual materials, drawing and writing contests, and field trips. Intervention in school programs is a particularly attractive option as it allows an early introduction to conservation issues and concepts, which if effectively presented and assimilated will continue to influence attitudes and actions later in life. Children will also

take the message home to their families and provide another means of disseminating messages to adults with limited access to communications media or low literacy levels.

### **3.2.8 Outdoor Education Programs**

Outdoor education programs can be used to provide direct, hands-on contact with nature, either as part of organized school programs or as an extracurricular or outside of school activity. Potential venues include forested areas (e.g., Bhawal National Park, which is relatively easily accessible from Dhaka), but also urban parks and wetlands. The main objective would be to provide an opportunity to observe and study biodiversity in its natural setting, within an appropriate learning structure and under informed guidance. Although this technique is likely to be limited to a relatively small target audience, effectiveness at promoting a conservation message and having a long-term influence on attitudes is likely to be very high. Attendance at extended programs could be used as a “reward” for exceptional performance in school environmental programs (see Section 3.2.7 above), thus focusing and enhancing positive impacts.

### **3.2.9 Interpretive Facilities and Programs in Protected Areas**

Some forest areas (e.g., Bhawal National Park, Madhupur National Park, Dulhazara Safari Park, and Lawachara National Park) currently receive high levels of visitation, primarily for picnicking. These all are suitable target areas for development of visitor centers, nature trails, and other interpretive programs for the promotion of public awareness among park visitors. However, planning and development of protected area facilities would need to proceed according to international standard guidelines to ensure that public awareness efforts in protected areas send the right message and are well-perceived by the recipients.

Development of such facilities has been identified as a key component of the Foundation’s program (see Curriculum for NGO Training in Conservation of Tropical Forest Biodiversity). The target group for interpretive facilities and programs is currently growing along with increasing urban affluence and demand for recreational activities. A high proportion of this group is likely to be well educated, and hence amenable to relatively sophisticated messages regarding the importance of forest conservation. This group is also likely to include a high proportion of the current and future decision-makers whose enlightenment and support is crucial to the success of conservation efforts in Bangladesh.

## **4. Practical Considerations in the Development of Public Awareness**

### **4.1 Stakeholders**

Important practical considerations regarding stakeholders are as follows:

- Although the stakeholders in forest biodiversity conservation can be broadly conceived as the mass general public (see Section 2.2), those who rely on forest resources for their livelihoods or are otherwise involved in their exploitation or management have a disproportionate influence on the success or failure of conservation measures. These include woodcutters, farmers, local businessmen, Forest Department officials and

politicians. All of these groups need to understand both the value of forest biodiversity resources and the consequences of its degradation and loss, and hence are critically important target groups for public awareness activities.

- Widespread awareness that the general public and local communities have an important stake in forest conservation needs to be developed. Public awareness needs to be raised as to the contribution that public-private partnerships can make to family livelihoods and, what is required to make them successful. In particular, the importance of the “social fencing” that can be created by strong public-private partnerships, by awareness of the importance of natural forests, and by demonstrably sustainable use of forest resources in and around the edges of protected forest areas, needs to be promoted.
- Grassroots organizations and local NGOs will play a pivotal role in the successful development of public awareness, as they are typically most aware of current social, cultural, economic and political issues. Such organizations need to be closely involved in the development and delivery of awareness materials.
- Public awareness materials need to adapt the abstract and technical subject matter of forest conservation into a practical and understandable format. Language, media used and level of sophistication all need to be adjusted to specific target audiences.
- Particularly in rural areas, separate awareness materials and messages need to be targeted towards women, as they are often the primary subsistence harvesters of forest resources and the first to suffer the consequences of its degradation.
- Awareness materials need to be developed and field-tested in consultation with local people. Messages aimed at rural residents should be relevant to their lifestyle and avoid jargon and scientific terminology.
- Development of broader awareness materials aimed at school children and the general public should focus on charismatic, high profile “flagship” species such as elephants, tigers, primates etc. “Red Databook” species also are suitable focal species for development of broadly based public awareness. Development of awareness in rural areas, where there may be some animosity towards wildlife due to crop raiding and injury to people, would most profitably focus on non-timber forest products, fish and other “usable” species with which rural residents are familiar. Awareness materials for these audiences should focus on printed materials (posters, booklets) and radio programming.

## 4.2 Geographic Scope

Effective development of public awareness will require a dual national and local focus. Many important issues are cross-cutting and national in scope, and can be effectively covered through development of national-level awareness campaigns. Other issues, as well as benefits from local forest conservation efforts will vary from location to location within the country, and these differences will need to be addressed in the development and delivery of public awareness

programs. Such programs will be most effective if they address issues of immediate relevance to a majority of stakeholders, utilizing suitable methodologies.

### **4.3 Cost-Effectiveness**

As indicated in Section 3.2, there are several methods and techniques that can be used to raise public awareness. All are not equally cost-effective. Important practical considerations regarding cost-effectiveness are as follows:

- The print media and other printed materials are generally highly cost-effective and suitable for mass distribution. Radio is also a highly cost-effective medium suitable for a wide audience.
- Television and film involve expensive front-end (production) costs but can be highly effective if the right message is developed. At present television is a suitable medium primarily for urban audiences.
- Some techniques (e.g., traditional media) are suitable primarily for small and selected audiences, although they also are low cost and can be very effective in terms of message delivery. Traditional performances disseminated by radio can combine effective message delivery with cost-effective dissemination.
- School programs can be expensive and time-consuming to develop, but are highly cost-effective in the long-run. Well-designed school programs are likely to be the best long-term investment in awareness development.
- Interpretive facilities in protected areas can also be expensive relative to the size of the target audience, and require a high level of expertise for their development. However, they can be very effective in terms of message delivery and subsequent positive impacts.

### **4.4 Timeframe**

Where basic facilities and expertise already exists, certain awareness activities (e.g., print media and other printed materials, radio programming, traditional media, billboards and wall-writing, messages in daily life, use of popular personalities) can be developed quickly, delivered within a short timeframe, and easily modified, as circumstances require. These provide a logical starting point for initial implementation of the Foundation's public awareness strategy.

Other awareness activities (e.g., television and film, school and outdoor education programs, interpretive facilities in protected areas) require a longer timeframe for development and delivery. The primary consequence of this is the need for careful forward planning, particularly in terms of funding and other resource availability.

## 5. Strategic Framework for the Development of Public Awareness

The answers to the following questions provide a conceptual framework for the Foundation's public awareness strategy. This framework is based on a consideration of target groups, feasible methodologies and techniques, and practical considerations as outlined above.

- **What are the key issues?**

Conservation of tropical forest biodiversity in Bangladesh, in the face of a limited and diminishing resource, heavy and increasing utilization, and the failure of current government programs to effectively conserve forest resources.

- **What is the message that the Foundation wants to deliver?**

The key messages of the Foundation should be:

- tropical forests and related biodiversity are resources that belong to all Bangladeshis
- tropical forests and related biodiversity are resources that can be sustainably utilized

- **Who will develop the messages?**

The messages should be developed by selected partner organizations, with overall guidance by the Foundation.

- **Who will deliver them?**

The messages should be delivered by selected partner organizations, possibly including, but not limited to, those involved in their development, also with overall guidance by the Foundation.

- **How will they be delivered?**

Public awareness should be delivered through a variety of methods and techniques, including but not necessarily limited to, modern mass media, traditional media, printed materials, billboards and wall-writing, messages in daily life, popular personalities, school programs, outdoor education programs, and interpretive facilities and programs in protected areas.

- **How much it will cost?**

Costs will depend on the methods and techniques used, the size of the target audience, and the time period over which the message is delivered. The choice of methods should strike a balance between relative cost-effectiveness and reaching the widest possible audience.

- **How will the effectiveness be evaluated?**

Effectiveness should be evaluated through continuous monitoring and assessment, using an appropriate mix of methodologies including standardized accounting techniques,

questionnaires, focus groups, and periodic independent evaluations based on measurable performance indicators.

## 6. Key Recommended Actions

To further develop and implement an effective public awareness strategy, it is recommended that the Foundation take the following actions:

- Immediately on becoming legally established, the Foundation should mount a modest public awareness initiative aimed at informing government decision-makers, NGOs and other development assistance agencies of its structure, goals and initial program of activities. This should include an information brochure (in both English and Bangla) for general distribution, appropriate press releases and briefings. This initial initiative should be followed by regular, periodic press releases, briefings, interviews and feature articles on the work of the Foundation. These “public relations” activities notwithstanding, the public awareness program of the Foundation should otherwise focus on 1) broader conservation issues of interest and relevance to the general Bangladeshi public; 2) mobilization of broad public support for locally implemented activities in forest conservation supported by the Foundation; and, 3) effective integration of successful public-private partnership activities supported by the Foundation into future public awareness programming.
- As soon as possible following its legal establishment, the Foundation should identify appropriate partners for further development and implementation of its public awareness strategy, including preparation of a multi-year work plan and budget, identifying activities, division of responsibilities and budgets, and monitoring and evaluation program. Co-funding by partner organizations should be encouraged to the extent possible.
- Coincident with the development of its public awareness workplan, the Foundation should establish a website that provides information on all of its developing programs, with the opportunity for partner and public input. The website should provide linkages to other websites (e.g., FAO) that contain educational and public awareness information on forest and biodiversity conservation.
- The Foundation should spearhead the development of a network of organizations (including government agencies) engaged in biodiversity conservation, environmental education, eco-tourism and related activities in Bangladesh. The objective of the network should be to develop and share information on tropical forests and biodiversity, and to develop education and communication materials for development of public awareness.
- The Foundation should ensure that its public awareness activities are based on as wide a range of methods and techniques as possible, consistent with available funding and cost effectiveness considerations.

- The Foundation should take early action to further investigate the feasibility of initiating a broadly-based school program and other activities focusing on children, recognizing that children are both the future stewards of Bangladesh's forest and biodiversity resources, and the future decision-makers on how it will be managed and conserved.